

Amendments to the Specification

Page 1, amend paragraph [0001] as follows:

[0001] This application is a continuation of application Ser. No. 09/848,676, filed May 3, 2001, now U.S. Patent No. 6,619,544, hereby incorporated by reference, which is a continuation-in-part application of U.S. Provisional Application Serial Number 60/202,507, filed May 5, 2000.

Pages 3-4, amend paragraph [0008] as follows:

[0008] The IBIP Specification defines this alternative version, which is referred to herein as a "virtual meter", which is a network metering system that has many client PCs without any PSDs coupled thereto. The client PCs run application software for requesting and formatting postage indicia, but all PSD functions are performed on server(s) located at a Data Center. The PSD functions at the Data Center may be performed in a secure device attached to a computer at the Data Center, or may be performed in the Data Center computer itself. The client PCs must connect with the Data Center to process transactions such as postage dispensing, meter registration, or meter refills. Transactions are requested by the client PC and sent to the Data Center for remote processing. The transactions are processed at the Data Center and the results are returned to the client PC. Accounting for funds and transaction processing are centralized at the Data Center. See, for example, U.S. Patents Nos. 5,454,038 and 4,873,645, which are assigned to the assignee of the present invention. An example of a virtual meter is ~~ClickStamp™~~ Clickstamp® Online Internet postage metering system, offered and maintained by Pitney Bowes Inc. ~~at its web site www.pitneyworks.com.~~ See also, International Patent Applications WO/9857302, WO98/57303, WO98/57304, WO98/57305, WO98/57306 and WO/9857460, each having an international filing date of June 12, 1998, for further descriptions of virtual metering.

Page 7, amend paragraph [0024] as follows:

[0024] In describing the present invention, reference is made to the drawings, wherein there is seen in Fig. 1, a virtual postage metering system, generally designated 10. The virtual postage metering system 10 includes a plurality (only one is shown) of personal computer (PC) systems, generally designated 20, each having access to a printer 22 for printing evidence of postage on an envelope. PC 20 is connected, via a network service provider 12, with a transaction processing Data Center 30 that performs postal accounting and evidencing of postage. The virtual postage metering system 10 allows each customer to use a conventional PC to remotely obtain evidence of postage payment on an as needed basis. Unlike conventional postage metering systems, virtual postage metering system 10 does not include any meter hardware located at the customer's site. Nor are any postal funds stored at the customer's site. All metering and accounting of funds occur at Data Center 30 using functional software and database records. Previously noted International ~~Previously noted~~ Patent Application WO/9857302 discloses a virtual postage metering system in which the database records in Data Center 30 comprised a plurality of meter accounts each of which represent a registered customer's licensed postage meter.

Page 8, amend paragraph [0026] as follows:

[0026] Virtual postage metering system 10 provides advantages and features found in virtual metering systems such as the previously noted ~~ClickStamp™~~ Clickstamp® Online Internet postage metering system. Virtual postage metering system 10 eliminates the need to maintain and account for traditional metering devices at each customer's site and provides flexibility for handling requests from multiple origins of deposit by each customer. Virtual postage metering system 10 also provides value added services that are not available with conventional meter devices, such as, real-time address hygiene, direct marketing services and trickle charge postage payment. Virtual postage metering system 10

can provide customer authentication by Data Center 30 to identify customers who have previously established user accounts. When a customer has been authenticated for each request, for example, by a username, password or other conventional methods, Data Center 30 services the request, and returns indicium information to the PC 20 where the indicium is created and printed on the mailpiece.

Page 9, amend paragraph [0030] as follows:

[0030] Instant virtual postage metering system 10 provides a metering system that has the capability of originating transactions from multiple origins of deposit. See, for example, ~~previously noted~~ U.S. Patent No. 6,546,377~~Application Serial Number 09/242,206~~, which describes individual meter accounts having multiple origins of deposit. Various methods can be used to determine the origin of deposit for a requested transaction. For example, a method for determining origin ZIP code using a caller ID from a telephone call is disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 5,943,658, filed December 31, 1996, and assigned to the assignee of the present invention.

Pages 13-14, amend paragraphs [0039] as follows:

[0039] In accordance with the present invention, customers desiring to print online postage can print postage immediately before a meter license is approved for the customer. The third embodiment is now described below with reference to Pitney Bowes ~~ClickStamp~~Clickstamp® Online Internet Postage the process of loaning a meter account to a customer is part of a marketing strategy to encourage use of the system by providing the instant printing of PC postage evidencing.

Page 14, amend paragraph [0040] as follows:

[0040] The present invention provides ~~ClickStamp~~Clickstamp® Online Postage customers with the ability to print postage immediately after online registration is completed and the client software for customer's PC has been loaded into the PC.

Page 14, amend paragraph [0042] as follows:

[0042] Referring now to Fig. 6, at step 300, the system is initialized when Pitney Bowes obtains a license from the USPS for at least one ~~ClickStamp~~Clickstamp® Online meter (meter account) with an origin zip code associated with every postal finance district. Each meter is authorized in accordance with the IBIP Centralized Specifications and is ready for use except that the meter state is set to a disabled mode to prevent unauthorized use.

Pages 14-15, amend paragraph [0043] as follows:

[0043] At step 304, customer registration occurs. When a customer registers for a meter license for the ~~ClickStamp~~Clickstamp® Online Product, Pitney Bowes loans to the customer the use of a meter licensed in the customer's zip code (loaner meter). The meter state for the loaner meter is changed to an enabled mode to allow authorized use. The loaner meter is provided to the customer for use pursuant to a short-term, for example 5 days maximum, agreement which expires at the end of the term or when a meter license is obtained for the customer, whichever occurs first. Following a registration process, Pitney Bowes applies for a postage meter license on behalf of the customer. Pitney Bowes charges the loaner meter with an initial postage amount, for example \$25 pursuant to a marketing program. In the event that the loaner meter has funds remaining from a previous loan attempt, the initial refill is added to the remaining funds. A Virtual PSD record and ~~ClickStamp™~~Clickstamp®

Online account corresponding to the loaner meter is modified to accept the customer's user ID, Password, and use the customer's e-mail address for all outgoing communications. However, the license and corresponding Virtual PSD record and ~~ClickStamp™~~Clickstamp® Online remain in Pitney Bowes name. In effect, Pitney Bowes is brokering postage to the customer. A new user secret key is generated for the meter via a re-keying process. A new user access key is e-mailed to the customer.

Page 15, amend paragraph [0044] as follows:

[0044] At step 308, the customer uses the loaner meter. The customer is instructed to download the client software from a Pitney Bowes the ~~ClickStamp~~Clickstamp® Online web site. Upon first use of the ~~ClickStamp~~Clickstamp® Online product, the customer is prompted to enter his access key. Once the key is entered, the customer may begin dispensing postage.

Page 15, amend paragraph [0046] as follows:

[0046] At step 312, when the customer's license is received, Pitney Bowes transfers the meter to the Customer's meter license. Pitney Bowes uninstalls the meter serial number under Pitney Bowes' license, and installs the meter serial number under the customer's license. Pitney Bowes updates all ~~ClickStamp~~Clickstamp® Online accounting and Virtual PSD database records to complete the license transition. Pitney Bowes applies for a new "loaner" license in the zip code of the transitioned meter in preparation for the next customer registration.

Page 16, amend paragraph [0047] as follows:

[0047] An alternative to step 312, when the customer's license is received, Pitney Bowes authorizes a new meter for the customer and requires the customer to delete and re-install the client application corresponding to the new meter. A new access key is e-mailed to the customer. Upon the next access to the ~~ClickStamp~~Clickstamp® Online server, the new access key is entered and the customer begins using the new meter. Pitney Bowes processes the loaner meter transaction logs to transfer any customer funds remaining to the customer's new meter account and bills the customer's credit card for any postage used. Pitney Bowes disables the loaner meter until required for another customer.

Page 18, amend paragraph [0055] as follows:

[0055] ~~ClickStamp~~Clickstamp® is a registered trademark of Pitney Bowes Inc.